

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/RATIONALE
DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2010-158-EA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined the proposed action will not have significant impacts on the human environment and that preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. **Rationale for Recommendations:** The proposed action would not result in any undue or unnecessary environmental degradation. The proposed action will be in compliance with the 1007 Roswell Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision and the 2001 New Mexico Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

/s/ J H Parman
J H Parman
Assistant Field Manager, Resources

9/2/2010
Date

Proposed Decision: It is my decision to implement the proposed action as described in DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2010-158-EA and issue grazing permits for allotments analyzed in this document. The mitigation measures identified in the attached EA have been formulated into terms and conditions that will be attached to the grazing permits. This decision incorporates, by reference, those conditions identified in the attached Environmental Assessment. A summary table follows.

Allotment Number	Allotment Name	Acres of Public Land	Percent Public Land	Animal Units Authorized	Animal Unit Months Authorized	Permitted Animal Units	Permitted Animal Unit Months
65032	Button Mesa	8479	57	275	1881	225	1539
65148	Caprock Playa	320	100	7	84	7	84
65090	South Caprock	3137	63	75	567	75	567
65078	Caudill Ranch	5792	68	118	967	118	967
Totals		17728		475	3499	425	3157

Rationale: Based on the rangeland health assessments (RHAs) and previous monitoring, resource conditions on these allotments are sufficient and sustainable to support the level of use outlined in the ten (10) year grazing permit. The Proposed Action is in conformance with the 1997 Roswell Resource Management Plan, and the 2001 New Mexico Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management.

Right of Protest and Appeal: If you wish to protest this proposed decision, you are allowed 15 days from receipt of this notice within which to file a protest with the Field Manager, Bureau of Land Management, 2909 West 2nd, Roswell, NM 88201, under Sec. 43 CFR 4160.1 and 4160.2. This protest should specify, clearly and concisely, why you think the proposed action is in error.

In the absence of a protest within the time allowed, the above decision shall constitute my final decision, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3 (a). In accordance with 43 CFR

4160.3(b) upon a timely filing of a protest, after a review of protests received and other information pertinent to the case, the authorized officer shall issue a final decision. Any applicant, permittee, lessee or other person whose interest is adversely affected by the final decision may file an appeal in accordance with 43 CFR 4.470 and 43 CFR 4160.4. The appeal must be filed within 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or within 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final as provided for in 43 CFR 4160.3(a). The appeal may be accompanied by a petition for a stay of the decision. The appeal and petition for a stay must be filed in the office of the authorized officer, as noted above. The appeal shall clearly and concisely state the reasons why the appellant thinks the final decision is in error, and otherwise complies with the provisions of 43 CFR 4.470.

Appeals can be filed at the following address:

Field Office Manager
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
2909 West Second Street
Roswell, NM 88201

J H Parman
Assistant Field Manager, Resources

Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

GRAZING AUTHORIZATIONS

For

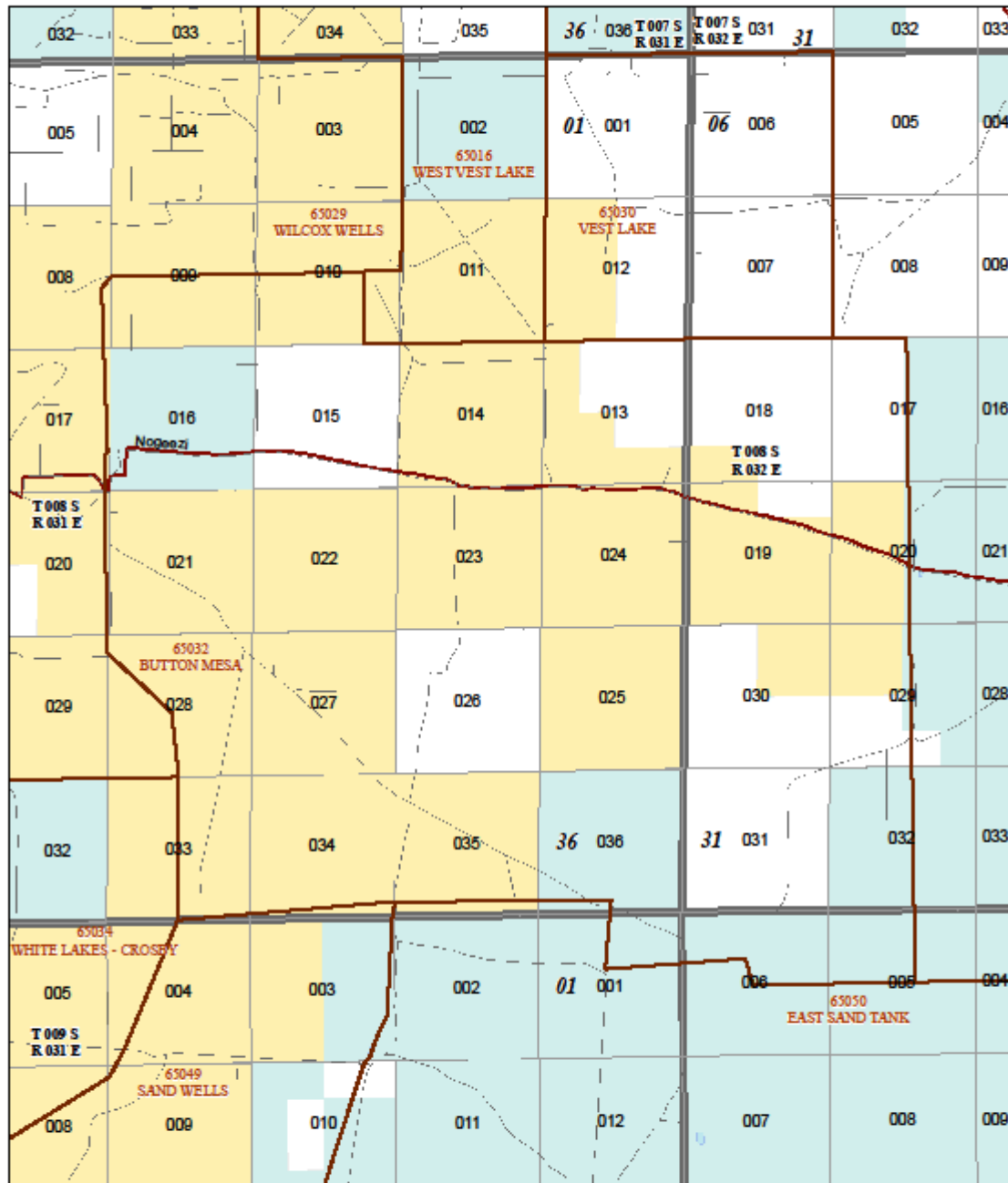
ALLOTMENT 65032,65148,65090,65078

Button Mesa
Caprock Playa
South Caprock
Caudill Ranch

DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2010-158-EA

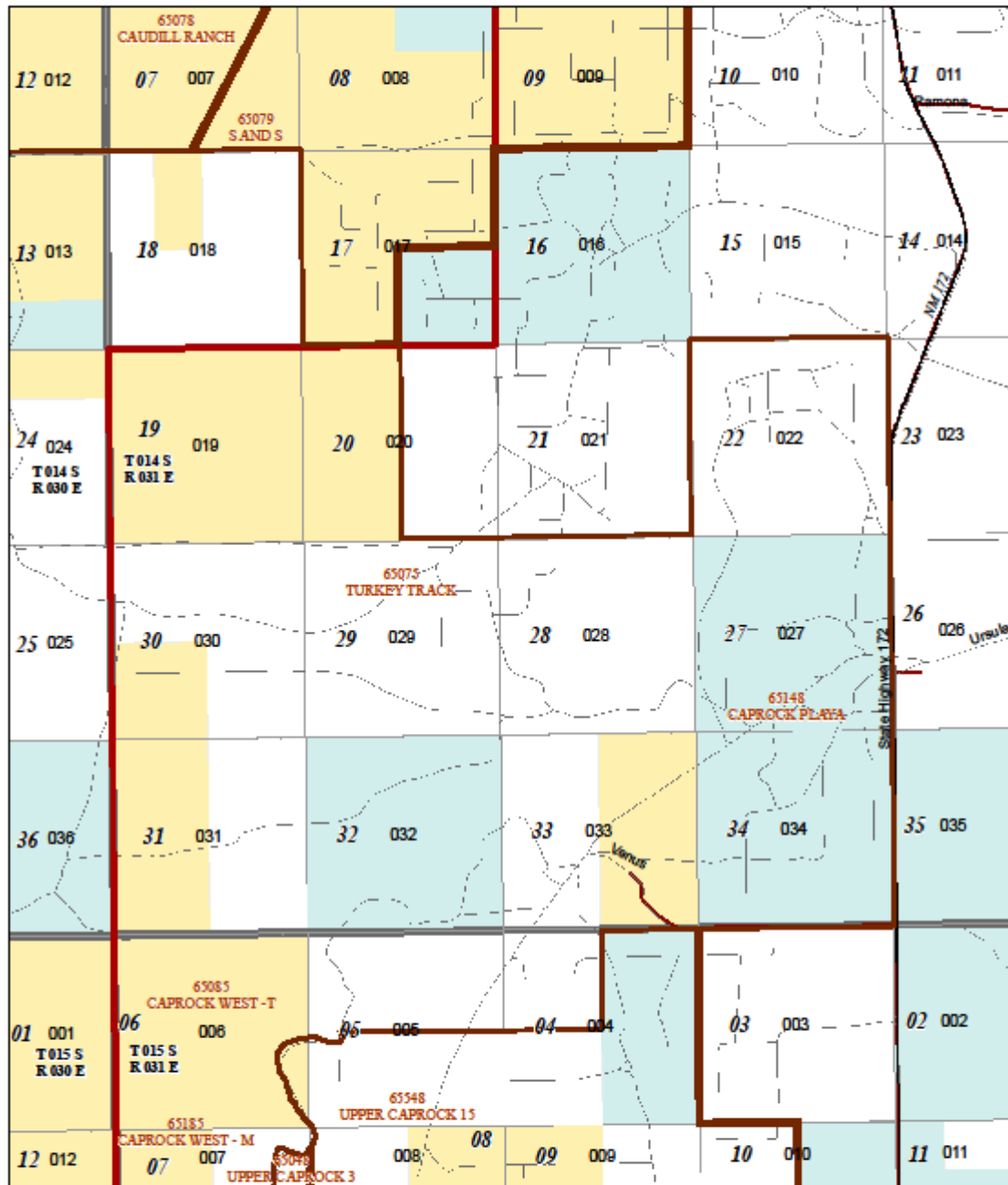
May 2010

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Roswell Field Office
Roswell, New Mexico



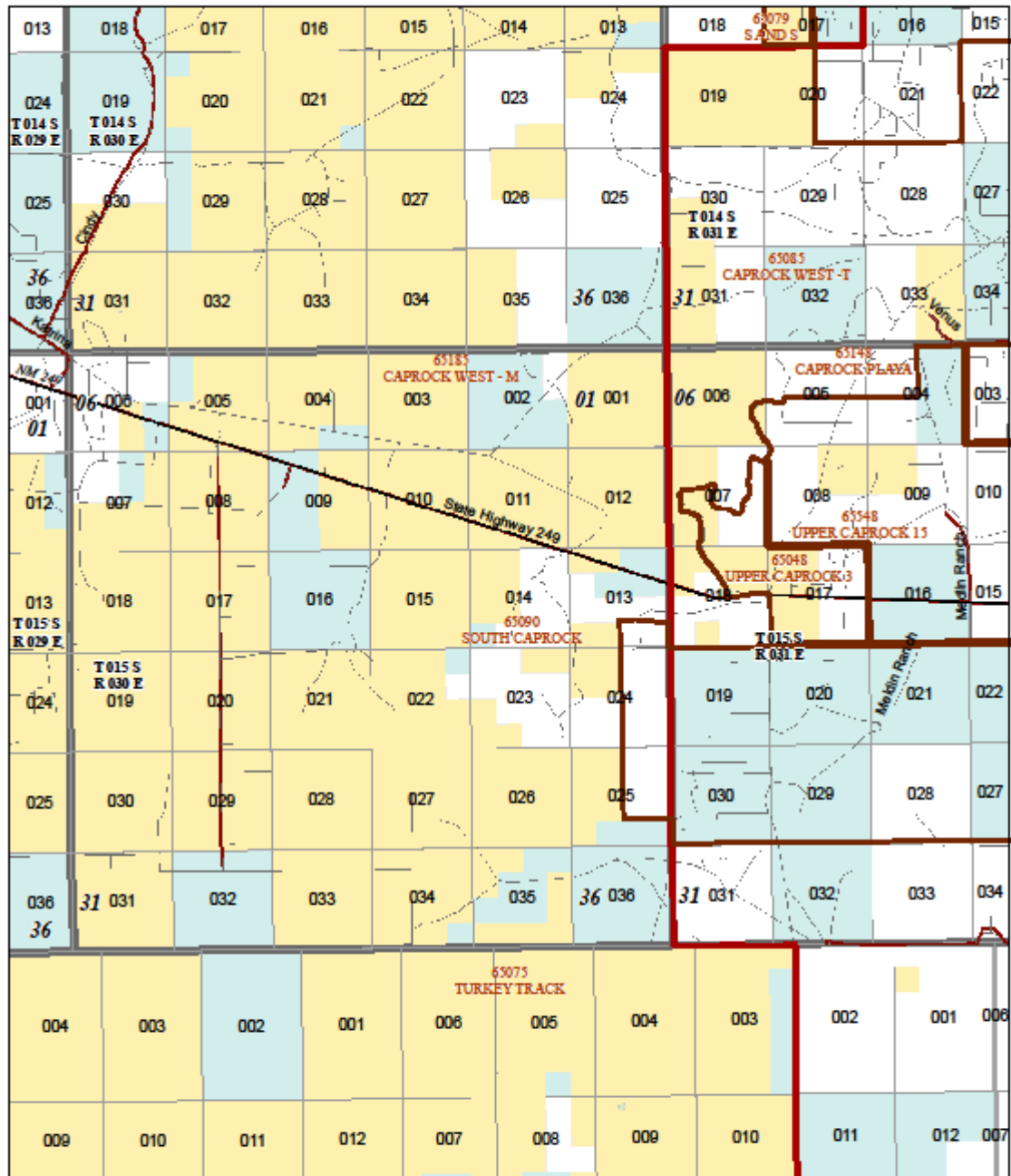
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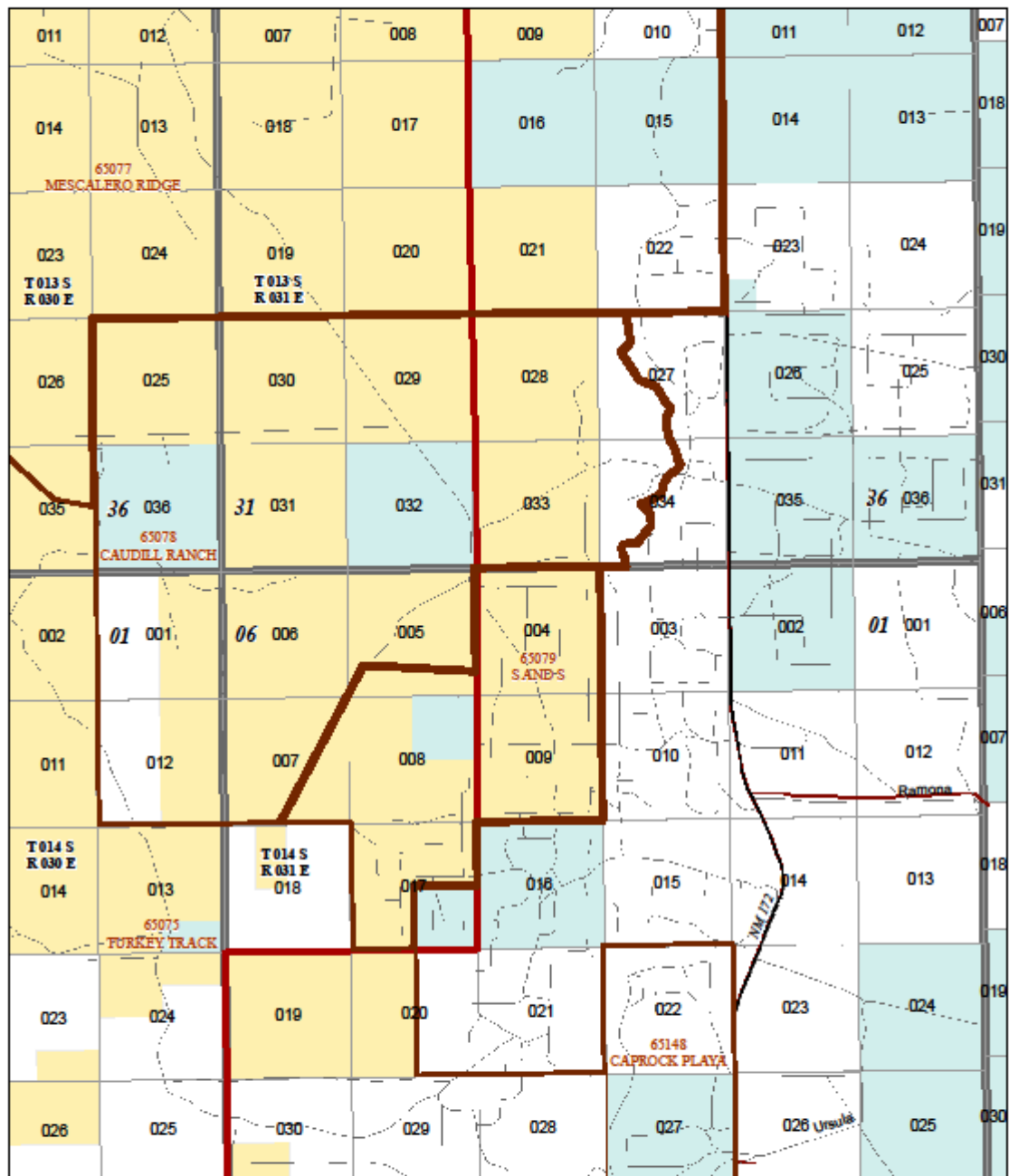
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Printing Date: 10/13/2009 Prepared By: gsmh File: V:\CONFLICT MAPS\PO Conflict 091009.mxd



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Printing Date: 10/13/2009 Prepared By: gsmc File: V:\CONFLICT MAPS\BPO_Cudill_091009.mxd

I. BACKGROUND

Purpose And Need For The Proposed Action

The purpose of issuing a new grazing permit would be to authorize livestock grazing on public range on Allotments 65032, 65148, 65090 and 65078. When authorizing livestock grazing on public range, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must conduct a site-specific NEPA analysis before issuing a permit to authorize livestock grazing. This environmental assessment fulfills the NEPA requirement by providing the necessary site-specific analysis of the effects of issuing a new grazing permit on these allotments. The permit would be needed to specify the types and levels of use authorized, and the terms and conditions of the authorization pursuant to 43 CFR §§4130.3, 4130.3-1, 4130.3-2, and 4180.1.

The scope of this environmental assessment is limited to the effects of issuing a new grazing permit on these allotments. Over time, the need could arise for subsequent management activities which relate to grazing authorization. These activities could include vegetation treatments (e.g., prescribed fires, herbicide projects), range improvement projects (e.g., fences, water developments), and others. Future rangeland management actions related to livestock grazing would be addressed in project-specific NEPA documents as they are proposed.

Though this environmental assessment specifically addresses the impacts of issuing a grazing permit on these allotments, it does so within the context of overall BLM management goals. Allotment management activities would have to be coordinated with projects intended to achieve those other goals. For example, a vegetation treatment designed to enhance watershed condition or wildlife habitat may require rest from livestock grazing for one or more growing seasons. Requirements of this type would be written into the permit as terms and conditions.

Conformance with Land Use Planning

The proposed action conforms to the 1997 Roswell Approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) and Record of Decision; the 2000 New Mexico Standards for Public Land health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management and Record of Decision; and the 2008 Special Status Species Resource Management Plan Amendment and Record of Decision as required by 43 CFR 1610.5-3.

Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposal to renew the livestock grazing permits on these allotments is in conformance with the 1994 Environmental Impact Statement for Rangeland Reform; the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (TGA) (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.); the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA) (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.).

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Proposed Action - Current Livestock Management

The proposed action is to issue a term 10 year permit to graze on these allotments. Current permitted use is based on long-term monitoring and rangeland conditions. Additionally a rangeland health assessment has been completed and all allotments meet the Standards for Public Land Health. See Table 1 below for details of these allotments.

Table 1. Animal Units/Animal Unit Months

Allotment Number	Allotment Name	Acres of Public Land	Percent Public Land	Animal Units Authorized	Animal Unit Months Authorized	Permitted Animal Units	Permitted Animal Unit Months
65032	Button Mesa	8479	57	275	1881	225	1539
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Totals		17728		475	3499	425	3157

There would be no changes from current livestock management as conducted by the permittee, or to existing range improvements already in place. Future projects or activities identified by the permittee or the BLM can still be considered for implementation. Rangeland monitoring would continue on the allotments and changes to livestock management would be made as necessary. If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken to mitigate those impacts.

No Grazing Alternative

Under this alternative a new grazing permit would not be issued for these allotments. No grazing would be authorized on federal land on these allotments under this alternative. Under this alternative and based on the land status pattern within the allotments, new fences would be required to exclude grazing on the federal land.

Alternatives Considered But Not Analyzed

Grazing with reduced numbers – BLM considered authorizing grazing with reduced numbers on these allotments. Grazing with reduced numbers would produce impacts similar to the proposed action. Additionally, these allotments meet the Standard for Public Land Health and monitoring studies do not indicate changes are necessary. Therefore, BLM will not analyze this alternative.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

General Setting

These allotments are located in Chaves County, approximately 40 miles east south east of Roswell, NM .

Allotment 65032 should continue the Temporary Non Use agreement for 50 AU's. The current 225 AU's is meeting habitat requirements.

Shinnery oak/dune (SOD) and Grasslands (GR) are the major plant communities occurring within allotments 65032, 65148, 65090 and 65078. Annual precipitation for this region averages 12 -13 inches. These communities are in the Canadian Plains major land resource system between elevations of 3,800 and 4,300 feet.

The grassland vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

Affected Resources

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected by the authorization of livestock grazing on these allotments: Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Floodplains, Prime or Unique Farmland, Minority/Low Income Populations, Hazardous or Solid Wastes, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Wilderness. Cultural resources in this region are not usually adversely affected by livestock grazing. Although concentrated livestock activity such as around livestock water troughs can have adverse effects on the cultural resource. As such all livestock water troughs should not be located within 100 feet of a known archaeological site. Prior to authorizing range improvements, a Class III Cultural Survey must be completed ensuring cultural resources will not be affected. Controlled livestock grazing effect on cultural resources is limited within the allotments due to the type of cultural resources present. Affected resources and the impacts resulting from livestock grazing are described below.

Vegetation

Affected Environment

The allotment is comprised of two vegetation community types arranged in a mosaic over the allotments. Shinnery Oak Dune (SOD) and Grassland communities dominate.

General objectives or guidelines for each vegetation community are described in the Roswell Approved RMP and Record of Decision (BLM 1997) and the Roswell Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 1994).

The primary features in the SOD community are topography influenced by aeolian and alluvial sedimentation on upland plains forming hummocks, dunes, sand ridges and swales and presence of shinnery oak (*Quercus havardii*). This is a unique community type found primarily below the Llano Estacado or Staked Plains, in an area known as Mescalero Sands. Topography is gently sloping and undulating sandy plains, with moderate to very steep hummocky dunes of up to ten feet and more in height scattered throughout. Some dunes are stabilized with vegetation, while a number of them are unstable and shifting. Dune blowouts with shinnery oak and bluestem (*Andropogon* spp.) either isolated or in dune complexes are common in this community.

A distinguishing feature for the grassland community is that grass species typically comprises 75% or more of the potential plant community. This community also includes shrub, half-shrub, and forb species. The percentages of grasses, forbs, and shrubs actually found at a particular location will vary with recent weather factors, past resource uses and the potential of the site. The Grassland community is scattered throughout the allotment.

Grasslands are intermixed with all community types. Sand dropseed, three-awn, gramas, sand bluestem, little bluestem bush muhly and fluffgrass are common in the sandy uplands.

Grassland communities also support shrub species such as broom snakeweed, cholla, yucca, mesquite and shinnery oak.

The Rangeland Health assessments conducted in 2005 and 2010 indicate a problem with invasive plants, most notably mesquite. Mesquite dominates the deep sand ecological sites and affects both the plant community and hydrologic functions of these sites.

The description for these ecological sites was developed by the Soil Conservation Service (now referred to as the National Resource Conservation Service) in their ecological site guides. Ecological site descriptions are available for review at the Roswell BLM office, any Natural Resources Conservation Service office or accessed at www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov.

From 1978 to 1999 agencies were using the traditional range condition methodology to depict range condition. This compared collected rangeland monitoring information with the potential vegetation community in terms of species composition by weight. The rating is based on a scaled of 0 to 100 with 100 being the actual representative site.

In 1999 the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) revised the methodology for comparing the existing vegetation community with the potential vegetation community and to aid in the determination of ecological condition. This methodology is called the Similarity Index (SI) the BLM is currently incorporating this revision into the monitoring and evaluation processes. The SI compares existing vegetation data (collected from rangeland monitoring) with the potential vegetation community described in the NRCS ecological site guide for that site. The index is based on a scaled of 0 to 100 with 100 being the actual representative site.

The percent bare ground and rock found on the allotments fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

Noxious and Invasive Weeds: Noxious weeds affect both crops and native plant species in the same way, by out-competing for light, water and soil nutrients. Losses are attributed to decreased quality and quantity of agricultural products due to high levels of competition from noxious weeds and infestations. Noxious weeds can negatively affect livestock productivity by making forage unpalatable to livestock thus decreasing livestock productivity and potentially increasing producer's feed costs. Potential noxious weed species include African rue, non native thistles (*Cirsium* spp.), leafy spurge, goldenrod. There are known populations of African rue on surrounding allotments therefore monitoring for noxious weeds on the allotment is necessary.

Environmental Impacts

Under the proposed action the vegetation in the Shinnery Oak Dune and Grassland communities will continue to be grazed and trampled by domestic livestock as well as other herbivores. The area has been grazed by livestock since the early part of the 1900's, if not longer. Ecological condition and trend is expected to remain stable and/or improve over the long term at the permitted number of livestock.

Upland sites would reflect a static ecological condition trend at the existing permit level. In the long term, upland vegetation would continue to improve in all pastures from the implementation of a rest-rotation system.

Range monitoring data indicate that the vegetation is sustainable to meet multiple resource requirements and forage at the permitted use level under the Proposed Action and Alternative Data indicate that livestock grazing is compatible with vegetation cover and composition objectives. In addition to the upward trend in ecological condition, monitoring data show the vegetative resources have been improved and sustained since monitoring began in 1981.

Under the No-Grazing Alternative, no impacts to vegetation resources would occur on public lands from authorized livestock grazing. Vegetation cover would increase over the long term in some areas. Grasslands in the uplands would increase in cover and composition, but composition would be tempered by mesquite somewhat dominating the shrub component.

Soils

Affected Environment

The Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), has surveyed the soils in Chaves County. Complete soil information is available in the Soil Survey of Chaves County, New Mexico, Southern Part and Northern Part (USDA Soil Conservation Service 1980). The soil map units represented in the project area are:

Faskin fine sand, 0 to 1 percent slopes (Fa) Runoff is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and soil blowing is severe.

Faskin-fine sand, 0 to 2 percent slopes (FaA) Permeability of the Faskin soil is moderate. Runoff of the unit soil is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate and the hazard of soil blowing is high. Permeability of the Malmstrom soil is moderately rapid. Runoff of the unit soil is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate and the hazard of soil blowing is high.

Faskin – Roswell complex, 0 to 15 percent slopes (Fr) Runoff is medium and the hazard of water erosion is slight and soil blowing is moderate.

Faskin – Malstrom association, 0 to 3 percent slopes (Fm) Runoff is slow or very slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and soil blowing is severe.

Faskin-Malstrom association, 0 to 2 percent slopes (FMA) Permeability of the Faskin soil is moderate. Runoff of the unit soil is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate and the hazard of soil blowing is high.

Jalmar fine sand, moist, 0 to 2 percent slopes (JaA) Permeability of the Jalmar soil is moderate. Runoff is slow, hazard of water erosion is slight, and the hazard of soil blowing is very high.

Jalmar-Roswell-Pyote association, 0 to 15 percent slopes (JRC) Permeability of the Jalmar soil is moderate. Runoff of the unit soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is high. Permeability of the Roswell soil is rapid. Runoff of the unit soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is high. Permeability of the Pyote soil is moderately rapid. Runoff of the unit soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is very high.

Ima fine sandy loam, 1 to 5 percent slopes (Im) Permeability is moderately rapid. Runoff is medium or slow. The hazard of water erosion is severe.

Kimbrough gravelly loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes (Km) Permeability is moderate. Runoff is medium. The hazard of erosion is slight.

Kimbrough-Stegall-Slaughter complex, 0 to 3 percent slopes (Kt) Permeability is moderate. For the Kimbrough soil runoff is medium. For Stegall and Slaughter soil, runoff is slow. The hazard of erosion for this complex is slight.

Ratliff Redona association, 0 to 2 percent slopes (RBA) Permeability of the Ratliff soil is moderate. Runoff of the Ratliff soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is high. Permeability of the Redona soil moderate. Runoff of the Redona soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and soil blowing is high.

Roswell-Jalmar fine sand, hilly., 0 to 25 percent slopes (RPD) Permeability of the Roswell soil is rapid. Runoff of the soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is very high. Permeability of the Jalmar soil is moderate. Runoff of the unit soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is very high.

Sharvana fine sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes (ShA) Permeability of the Sharvana soil is moderate. Runoff of the soil is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate and the hazard of soil blowing is high.

Simona fine sandy loam, 0 to 5 percent slopes (Sm) Runoff of the Berino soil is very slow and the hazard of water erosion is slight and the hazard of soil blowing is severe.

Stromal-Faskin-Malstrom fine sands, Sharvana fine sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes (SOA) Permeability of the Stromal soil is moderately rapid. Runoff of the soil is slow and the hazard of water erosion is high and the hazard of soil blowing is very high. Permeability of the Faskin soil is moderate. Runoff of the soil is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate and the hazard of soil blowing is very high. Permeability of the Malstrom soil is moderately rapid. Runoff of the soil is medium and the hazard of water erosion is moderate and the hazard of soil blowing is very high.

Torriorthents, moderately steep, 15 to 25 percent slope, (TOD) Permeability is moderate. Runoff is rapid, hazard of water erosion is high, and the hazard of soil blowing is slight.

Environmental Impacts

Under the Proposed Action, livestock would remove some of the cover of standing vegetation and litter, and compact the soil by trampling. If livestock management were inadequate, these effects could be severe enough to reduce infiltration rates and increase runoff, leading to greater water erosion and soil losses (Moore et al. 1979, Stoddart et al. 1975). Producing forage and protecting the soil from further erosion would then be more difficult. The greatest impacts of removing vegetation and trampling would be expected in areas of concentrated livestock use, such as trails, waters, feeders, and shade.

Under the Proposed Action rangeland monitoring would help ensure that adequate vegetation cover is maintained to protect the soil from erosion. Low/moderate forage quality plants provide protection to the soils resource. Cumulative long term monitoring data reflect the soils are being adequately protected.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, any adverse impact from livestock grazing would be eliminated. However, it is possible that removing grazing animals from an area where they were a natural part of the landscape could result in poor use of precipitation and inefficient mineral cycling (Savory 1988). Bare soil could be sealed by raindrop impact, and vegetation could become decadent, inhibiting new growth. Therefore, the results of no grazing could be similar to those of overgrazing in some respects.

Water Quality

Affected Environment - Ground Water

Fresh water sources are in the Quaternary Shallow Alluvium Aquifer. Depth to water in nearby wells in the shallow aquifer ranges from 50 to 60 feet (Water Table Contour Map of Part of East Chaves County, Geohydrology and Associates 1978).

Environmental Impacts – Ground Water

The proposed action would not have a significant effect on ground water. Livestock would be dispersed over the allotment, and the soil would filter potential contaminants.

Affected Environment – Surface Water

No perennial surface water is found on the Public Land on these allotments.

Environmental Impacts – Surface Water

Direct impacts to surface water quality would be minor, short-term impacts during stormflow. Indirect impacts to water-quality related resources, such as fisheries, would not occur. .

Wildlife

Affected Environment

The allotment provides a variety of habitat types for terrestrial wildlife species. The diversity and abundance of wildlife species in the area is due to the presence of a mixture of grassland habitat and mixed desert shrub vegetation.

Avian species potentially occurring within these allotments based on the presence of suitable habitat include the lesser prairie-chicken, bobwhite quail, scaled quail, mourning dove, white-winged dove, road runner, western king bird, scissor-tailed flycatcher, ash-throated flycatcher, pyrrhuloxia, Scott's oriole, Bullock's oriole, Chihuahuan raven, turkey vulture, Harris' hawk, northern harrier, prairie falcon, Swainson's hawk, Ferruginous hawk, red-tailed hawk, golden eagle, merlin, American kestrel, barn owl, great horned owl, burrowing owl, lesser night hawk, various hummingbirds, horned larks, lark bunting, logger-headed shrike, cactus wren, western tanager, curve-billed thrasher, mocking bird, various warblers and sparrows.

Mammals known to occur throughout the allotment include various bats, mule deer, pronghorn

antelope, javalina, desert cottontail, black-tailed jackrabbit, spotted ground squirrel, pocket gopher, porcupine, coyote, gray fox, bobcat, raccoon, striped and spotted skunk, wood rat and various other small rodents. This is not a complete list, as there are other mammal species that are highly likely to occur on these allotments.

Herptofauna (reptiles and amphibians) potentially associated with the allotments include the Couch's spadefoot toad, green toad, Red-spotted toad, plains leopard frog, collared lizard, Texas horned lizard, short-horned lizard, roundtail horned lizard, prairie lizard, Texas spotted whiptail, six-lined racerunner, western whiptail, little striped whiptail, great plains skink, leopard lizard, lesser earless lizard, sand dune lizard, side-blotched lizard, many lined skink, New Mexico milk snake, ringneck snake, Texas blind snake, glossy snake, longnose snake, plains black-headed snake, checkered garter snake, coachwhip, striped whipsnake, gopher snake, western hognose snake, common kingsnake, blackneck garter snake, western garter snake, western rattlesnake, massasauga and the western diamondback rattlesnake.

Migratory Birds: Executive order #13186 titled "Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds"; signed 1/10/01 requires that the BLM evaluate the effects of federal actions on migratory birds. No migratory bird inventory has been completed for the proposed project area. Common migratory birds which may use the area as habitat include various species of song birds, owls, ravens, hawks, finches, doves, thrashers, and meadow larks.

Environmental Impacts

Under the Proposed Action, livestock grazing management and range improvement projects designed with consideration for wildlife would generally enhance the quality of wildlife habitat. Vegetation condition, forage production, and habitat diversity would improve, and wildlife species distribution and abundance would increase. The construction of livestock waters in previously unwatered areas would promote increased wildlife distribution and abundance, but may potentially increase grazing pressure in those same areas. Short-term impacts of range improvement projects would be the temporary displacement of wildlife species during construction activities.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, there would no longer be direct competition between livestock and wildlife for forage, browse and cover. Wildlife habitat would moderately improve. The limitation for improvement would continue to be the existing invading species component (e.g., mesquite, snakeweed) affecting plant composition. Since livestock grazing would not be permitted, range improvement projects that benefit wildlife, such as water developments, would be abandoned. New range improvement projects that would also benefit wildlife habitat, such as brush control, may not be implemented because these projects are primarily driven and funded through range improvement efforts.

Special Status Species, Including Threatened and Endangered Species

Federally Listed Threatened/Endangered Species:

There are no species listed as endangered, threatened, or proposed for protection under the Endangered Species Act known on these allotments. Designated critical habitat for a listed species also does not occur on these allotments.

Other Special Status Species

The species listed below are also potentially associated with these allotments and are considered sensitive due to their state of NM status and BLM sensitive status. (BS refers to BLM Sensitive species, FC refers to Federal Candidates for listing for protection under the Endangered Species Act, and SE refers to State Endangered species.)

	<u>Status</u>	<u>Riparian/Aquatic</u>	<u>Uplands</u>
Loggerhead shrike <i>Lanius ludovicianus</i>	BS		x
Lesser prairie-chicken <i>Tympanuchus pallidicinctus</i>	FC		x
Sand dune lizard <i>Sceloporus arenicolus</i>	FC		x

SE--State Endangered, BS--BLM Sensitive, FC--Federal Candidate

Loggerhead Shrike

The shrike occurs throughout the sand shinnery oak community of Chavez, Eddy and Lea county. The shrike is usually seen in relatively xeric habitats dominated by shrubs and desert grasses. Some of the important shrubs are honey mesquite and fourwing saltbush, and some of the grasses include tobosa, grama spp., sand dropseed, and three-awn. Trees are generally uncommon but a few large honey mesquite, soapberry, or hackberry are occasionally present.

Lesser prairie-chicken

The lesser prairie-chicken (LPC) is a species of prairie grouse endemic to the southern high plains of the United States, commonly recognized for its feathered feet, stout build, ground-dwelling habit, and elaborate breeding behavior.

The historic range of the LPC encompassed habitats with sandy soils supporting shinnery oak (*Quercus harvardii*)-bluestem (*Andropogon* sp.) and sand sage (*Artemisia filifolia*)-bluestem communities in the high plains of southeastern Colorado, southwestern Kansas, western Oklahoma, west Texas, the Texas panhandle, and eastern New Mexico. In New Mexico, Ligon (1961) reported the historic range as being the sandhill-bluestem plains, an approximately 120 km (75 mi) wide swath from the northeast border with Colorado to the southeast border with Texas and in northern De Baca County to 48 km (30 mi) west of Ft. Sumner.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the former range of the LPC in New Mexico was described as all of the sandhill rangeland of eastern New Mexico as far west as De Baca County. Ligon (1927) mapped the breeding range as encompassing portions of seven counties, a small subset of what he described as former range. In the 1950s and 1960s, occupied range was more extensive, indicating reoccupation of some areas. Presently, the NMDGF reports that LPCs are known from portions of seven counties and the occupied range of the LPC in New Mexico is estimated to encompass approximately 5,698 km² (2,200 mi²) (Davis 2006) compared with its historic range of 22,390 km² (8,645 mi²). Private and State land supports approximately 40 percent of the LPC population in New Mexico, with the remaining occurring on lands managed by BLM (Davis 2006). In the 1950s, the LPC population was estimated at 40,000 to 50,000

individuals, but by 1972 the population had declined to an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 individuals. NMDGF currently estimates the LPC statewide population to be about 9,443 individuals (Beauprez 2008).

In New Mexico, the most recent LPC population decline began in 1989. LPC counts on leks dropped dramatically in the BLM Caprock Wildlife Habitat Management Area and in west-central Lea County (Smith et al. 1998). Estimated hunter harvest also declined sharply (Cowley 1995), resulting in closure of hunting seasons in New Mexico in 1996. Although the decline may have been precipitated by drought conditions and reduced nest success, it is also likely that population recovery during the drought was hampered by habitat fragmentation and low recruitment. Since 2005, weather conditions have improved resulting in population increases, and Federal and State agencies have focused staff time and funding to address habitat concerns. From 1998-2008 LPC populations within the core area of southern Roosevelt, northern Lea, and eastern Chaves counties have increased (Beauprez 2008). The LPC population south of U.S. Highway 380 in southeastern Chaves County has shown a significant decline over the same ten-year period, even though 5 leks were detected in 2008, the largest number of leks detected since 1998 (Beauprez 2008). In 1995, conservation interests petitioned the USFWS to list the LPC as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. In 1998, the FWS ruled that such a listing was warranted, but precluded by the need to devote limited agency resources to other higher priority species. The species is currently considered a candidate species for listing. The 2008 Candidate Notice of Review elevated the species to a Listing Priority Number of 2, the highest priority ranking as a candidate species.

Sand Dune Lizard

The sand dune lizard (SDL) is native to a small area of southeastern New Mexico and west Texas. A habitat specialist, the SDL only occurs in sand dune complexes associated with shinnery oak (Degenhardt et al. 1996), with areas often separated by large stretches of unsuitable habitat.

The SDL prefers active and semi-stabilized sand dunes associated with shinnery oak and scattered sandsage. The oaks provide dune structure, shelter, and habitat for the species' prey base. SDLs are found in large dunes with deep, wind hollowed depressions called blowouts, where they remain under vegetation or loose sand during the hot part of the day and at night. These large, deep dunal blowouts (greater than 3 m deep and 32.9 m long) provide superior habitat with more area for cover (for thermoregulation and predator avoidance) and steeper slopes needed as breeding habitat. SDLs avoid shallow blowouts.

SDLs feed on ants, small beetles, crickets, grasshoppers, and spiders. Most feeding takes place within or adjacent to patches of vegetation, usually shinnery oak habitat. Individuals are diurnal and wary, and will seek protection and shelter in burrows, under the sand, beneath leaf litter, and under the shinnery oak canopy (BLM 2006). Within a dune complex, the shinnery flats between dune blowouts are used for movement by females seeking nesting sites and for dispersal of recent hatchlings (Painter 2007). Therefore, it is imperative that connectivity be considered across interdunal areas.

Within the geographic range of the species, habitat is localized and fragmented where known populations are separated by vast areas of unoccupied habitat. Fitzgerald et al. (1997) observed isolated areas of apparently suitable habitat that did not contain SDLs. It is possible that these observations are the result of local extinction events in isolated areas where recolonization is either impossible or has not yet occurred (Snell et al. 1997). It is also possible that these areas have never been occupied and other factors such as competition with or

predation by other species prevent SDL occupation in otherwise suitable habitat. Recent surveys by the BLM have reconfirmed the presence of SDLs within the known geographic range of the species. The BLM has also developed a habitat predictability model to help redefine the parameters of the known geographic range.

Conservation interests petitioned the USFWS to list the SDL as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. In 2001, the FWS ruled that such a listing was warranted, but precluded by the need to devote limited agency resources to other higher priority species. The species is currently considered a candidate species for listing. The 2008 Candidate Notice of Review retained the species at Listing Priority Number of 2, the highest priority ranking as a candidate species.

Impacts

Lesser prairie-chicken

Grazing is one of the dominant land uses on public and private lands throughout the range of lesser prairie chickens (LPCs). The evolutionary history of the mixed-grass prairie resulted in endemic bird species adapted to a mosaic of lightly to heavily grazed areas (Bragg and Steuter 1996; Knopf and Samson 1997). In some areas within LPC range where heavy grazing has removed tallgrass and midgrass cover, insufficient amount of lightly grazed habitat is available to support successful nesting (Jackson and DeArment 1963; Davis et al. 1979; Crawford 1980; Taylor and Guthery 1980; Davies 1992). Uniform or widespread livestock grazing of rangeland, to a degree that leaves less than adequate residual cover remaining in the spring, is considered detrimental to LPC populations because grass height is reduced below that necessary for secure nesting cover and desirable food plants are markedly reduced (Bent 1932; Davis et al. 1979; Crawford 1980; Bidwell and Peoples 1991; Riley et al. 1992; Giesen 1994b). Residual cover at and around nests is thought to increase nest success because the nest is better concealed from predators (Davis et al. 1979; Wisdom 1980; Riley et al. 1992; Giesen 1994b).

The impacts of grazing on LPC habitat can vary widely, depending on climatic conditions, the state or health of range vegetation, and the type of grazing regime utilized. Drought tends to magnify grazing impacts, as both processes reduce plant cover (Giesen 2000). When forage is reduced by drought, what remains tends to be grazed more heavily unless animal numbers are reduced. As a result, some grazed areas may supply adequate habitat during periods of normal rainfall, but may be unable to support LPCs during periods of drought (Merchant 1982). Intensive and/or persistent grazing may reduce or eliminate residual tallgrass cover needed for nesting (Davis et al. 1979; Riley et al. 1992). Heavy grazing that repeatedly interrupts plant succession over a broad area may result in the conversion of tallgrass prairie to shortgrass or forb-dominated habitat (Hoffman 1963; Jackson and DeArment 1963; Litton et al. 1994) or shrub-dominated landscapes.

Suitable habitat for LPCs has been lost due to conversion to agriculture and modified through grazing practices and other factors, such that remaining suitable habitat is increasingly fragmented and isolated (Crawford 1980; Braun et al. 1994). Fragmentation may threaten local LPC populations through several mechanisms: habitat juxtaposition and remaining patches of rangeland may be smaller than necessary to support populations (Samson 1980); necessary habitat heterogeneity may be lost; habitat between patches may accommodate high densities of predators; and ability to move and/or disperse among suitable patches of habitat may decrease (Wilcove et al. 1986; Knopf 1996).

Wire fencing is common throughout LPC range as a means of confining livestock to ranches and pastures, or excluding them from areas not intended for grazing such as CRP, agricultural fields, and public roads. Like most grassland wildlife, LPC evolved in open habitats free of vertical features or flight barriers. Fences, power lines, or other wire structures are an unnatural threat to prairie grouse that, until recently, were seldom perceived as significant at the population level (Wolfe et al. 2007).

Lesser prairie-chicken was a focal species in the 2008 Pecos District Special Status Species Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment. Through the planning process, the USFWS supported BLM's determination of "may affect, not likely to affect" for LPC. The management prescriptions of the plan include vegetation management and livestock management (grazing) as addressed on pages 15-23 of the Amendment and further in Appendix 2.

Sand dune lizard

There are no known direct impacts to sand dune lizard (SDL) from livestock grazing. However, domestic livestock and wildlife grazing practices that reduce the ability of the land to sustain long term plant and animal production (Smith et al. 1996) may lead to the loss of grassland cover, mortality of plant species, and increased erosion. Further, improper grazing practices and increased conversion of rangelands to agricultural production may lead to habitat fragmentation and loss by promoting conditions favorable for shrub encroachment and by increasing infrastructure development, such as roads, drinkers, windmills, water pipelines, and fences (Dinerstein et al. 2000). These land management activities are compounded by extended drought periods and altered hydrologic functions.

Sand dune lizard was a focal species in the 2008 Pecos District Special Status Species Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment. Through the planning process, the USFWS supported BLM's determination of "may affect, not likely to affect" for SDL. The management prescriptions of the plan include vegetation management and livestock management (grazing) as addressed on pages 15-23 of the Amendment and further in Appendix 2.

Air Quality

Affected Environment

The allotment is in a Class II area for the Prevention of Significant Deterioration of air quality as defined by the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

Air quality in the region is generally good, with winds averaging 10-16 miles per hour depending on the season. Peak velocities reach more than 50 miles per hour in the spring. These conditions rapidly disperse air pollutants in the region.

Environmental Impacts

Dust levels resulting from allotment management activities would be slightly higher under the Proposed Action or Alternative B than No-Grazing Alternative. The cumulative impact on air quality from the allotment would be negligible compared to all pollution sources in the region.

Livestock Management

Affected Environment

In the past, these allotments have been permitted to be grazed yearlong by cattle. The permits authorized 425 Aus. Grazing is by a cow/calf operation.

The allotments contain about 17,728 total acres (see Location Map). Current range improvement projects for the management of livestock include earthen tanks, wells, and several drinking troughs with associated pipelines, pasture and boundary fences and corrals.

Environmental Impacts

Under the Proposed Action, livestock would continue to graze public lands within the allotments. Existing pasture configurations and water developments would remain the same. Livestock management would still follow the single-herd rotation system.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, there would be no livestock grazing authorized on public lands. The public lands would have to be fenced apart from the private lands or livestock would be considered in trespass if found grazing on public land (43 CFR 4140.1(b)(1)). Exclusion of livestock from the public land would approximately cost (\$12,000/mile). This expense would be borne by the private landowner. Range improvements on public land would not be maintained and the BLM would have to compensate the permittee if any of the improvements were cost shared at the time of their authorization.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, the overall livestock operation could be reduced by 292 AUs (those attached to the public lands) to approximately 183 AUs. This would have an adverse economic impact on the permittee, the county and the state.

Cumulative impacts of the grazing and no grazing alternatives were analyzed in Rangeland Reform '94 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (BLM and USDA Forest Service 1994) and in the Roswell Resource Area Draft RMP/EIS (BLM 1994). The no livestock grazing alternative was not selected in either document.

Visual Resources Management

Affected Environment

The allotment is in a Class III and IV area for visual resources management. The Class III objective is to: Partially retain existing landscape character. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate a casual observer's view. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. The objective of Class IV is to: "Provide for management activities which require major modification of the existing landscape character...Every attempt, however, should be made to reduce or eliminate activity impacts through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic landscape elements."

Environmental Impacts

The basic elements of the landscape would not change within the allotment under any management alternative. Potential impacts to visual resources would be analyzed and mitigated as allotment management activities are proposed in the future.

Recreation

Affected Environment

The allotment provides habitat for numerous game species including desert mule deer, pronghorn, mourning dove and scaled quail. Predator and feral pig hunting may occur on the allotment, as well as trapping for predators or furbearers.

General sightseeing, wildlife viewing and photography are non-consumptive recreational activities that may occur. Rock collectors find various minerals unique to the area, such as Pecos diamonds.

Environmental Impacts

Game and non-game wildlife species could realize long-term benefits through the improvement of habitat. It is expected that hunter success and wildlife viewing opportunities would be enhanced.

Under No-Grazing Alternative, no conflicts between ranching activities and recreational use would occur on public lands. Success of hunts and non-consumptive opportunities would remain the same or slightly improve. Vandalism could still occur to range improvements. Conflicts with OHV use would continue.

Cave and Karst

Affected Environment

These allotments are located within a designated area of medium Cave or Karst Potential. A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the public land located in these grazing allotments. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within these allotments.

Environmental Impact

Since no caves or major karst features have been identified on these grazing allotments, grazing would not affect these resources. If a significant cave or karst feature were discovered on public land within these allotments, that cave or feature may be fenced to exclude livestock and off-highway vehicle use.

IV. CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

A cumulative impact is defined in 40 CFR 1508.7 as:

“the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other

actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.”

The incremental impact of issuing a grazing permit on these resources must be analyzed in the context of impacts from other actions. Other BLM actions that could have impacts on the identified resources include: livestock authorization on other allotments in this area; oil and gas activities on the uplands; rights-of way crossing the area; and recreation use, particularly off-highway vehicles. All authorized activities which occur on BLM land can also take place on state and private land.

Many of the actions which could contribute to cumulative impacts have occurred over many years. Impacts from open-range livestock grazing in the last century are still being addressed today. Oil and gas activities began in the early part of the 20th century. These activities are still occurring today, and are expected to continue into the foreseeable future to some degree.

If the No-Grazing Alternative were chosen, some adverse cumulative impacts would be eliminated, but others would occur. Grazing would no longer be available as a vegetation management tool, and BLM lands within the allotment would be less intensively managed.

Wildlife: Wildlife, as well as domestic livestock, will continue to utilize the available forage and browse. The amount of cover available for the various wildlife species present on the allotment will fluctuate, based on livestock use levels and amount of precipitation. Maintenance and operation of existing waterings will continue to provide a dependable water source for wildlife, as well as livestock.

Livestock grazing may have an impact on the various habitat components of some wildlife species. Livestock select the herbaceous component, which provides a source of food for various neotropical migrants and upland game birds, first before other vegetative types such as browse or forbs. Subsequently, impacts to the ground nesting birds and to the various food types utilized by avian species (seeds, green vegetative material, etc.) can range from beneficial to detrimental depending on specific livestock management scheme including season of use, pasture rotation system, annual precipitation and number of livestock.

Specifically, in the Button Mesa, South Caprock and Caudill Ranch allotments, cattle are rotated between pastures, adequate growing season rest is given to pastures before cattle return to them, voluntary nonuse is taken during drought periods, and utilization levels are within the acceptable range so the impacts from livestock grazing to wildlife is minimized.

Special Status Species

Lesser prairie-chicken

Residual (growth from the previous year) cover in the form of sand bluestem, little bluestem, dropseeds (*Sporobolus* spp.), and other native warm-season grasses are the preferred nesting substrate for lesser prairie-chicken (LPC), and these grasses typically occur under light to moderate grazing intensities (Riley et al. 1992). When birds are forced to nest in isolated small pockets of suitable cover, or in areas of less than suitable cover, nesting success is greatly reduced. In these areas, nest failure due to predation is increased.

Livestock grazing may reduce nesting success when it results in less residual grass height and

density, or less litter and more bare ground (Riley 1978, Wisdom 1980). Range management practices that do not leave adequate residual cover contribute to the decline of nesting habitat. Intensive grazing that does not include sufficient rest at the end of the growing season can eliminate some residual cover necessary for nesting the following spring. Severe climatic events such as drought often magnify the effect of livestock grazing throughout the LPC range.

Lesser prairie-chicken was a focal species in the 2008 Pecos District Special Status Species Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment. Through the planning process, the USFWS supported BLM's determination of "may affect, not likely to affect" for LPC. The management prescriptions of the plan include vegetation management and livestock management (grazing) as addressed on pages 15-23 of the Amendment and further in Appendix 2.

Sand Dune Lizard

There are extensive public land shinnery oak habitats that have been altered by grazing, spraying of the herbicide tebuthiuron, and oil and gas development and exploration. There are oil and gas facilities located throughout the allotments. As the lizard occupies the dunal blowout features exclusively, livestock grazing itself will not affect the lizard and there has been no documentation of direct effects on lizards due to grazing.

Loggerhead Shrike

Declines in range wide populations are attributed to the consumption of contaminated prey (large insects and small mammals), the loss of nesting sites such as hedgerows and thorn trees, and the loss of pastureland feeding habitat. Specifically, impacts to the shrike in the RFO can be attributed primarily to drought conditions affecting prey species, and loss of nesting habitat. Loggerhead shrikes nest in shrubs, so a decrease in shrub density would lead to a decrease in nesting structure available for the shrike. Shrub communities within these allotments are abundant so nesting habitat for the shrike is not impacted in these allotments. Concurrently, since cattle are primarily herbaceous grazers, the grazing of livestock within the allotment would not impact the nesting habitat for the loggerhead shrike.

V. MITIGATION MEASURES

Vegetation monitoring studies will continue if a new grazing permit were issued under the Proposed Action. Changes to livestock management would be made if monitoring data showed adverse impacts to the vegetation.

If new information surfaces that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken at that time to mitigate those impacts.

VI. RESIDUAL IMPACTS

Residual impacts are direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts that would remain after applying the mitigation measures. Residual impacts following authorization of livestock grazing would be insignificant if the mitigation measures are properly applied.

VII. Socio-Economic Factors

The proposed action or Alternative B as outlined in this document are not anticipated to alter the socio-economic conditions for either the permittees or Chaves County. Should the no livestock grazing alternative be adopted, economic impacts would occur. Chaves County would lose tax revenues on approximately 292 head of cattle annually.

Under the no livestock grazing alternative, it would be the responsibility of the permittees to prevent livestock from grazing on the public lands. To accomplish this, the permittees would most likely have to construct fences to exclude the public land. New fence would be needed at a cost of approximately \$10,000/mile. BLM would also have to provide compensation to the permittees for their interest in authorized range improvements due to the exclusion of livestock grazing. These costs could be reduced or mitigated by land exchanges with either the state or the permittees to block up the public land.

IX. BLM Team Members

Helen Miller - Rangeland Management Specialist
Kyle Arnold - Rangeland Management Specialist
Mike McGee - Hydrologist
Rebecca L. Hill – Archaeologist
Howard Parman – Environmental Coordinator
Bill Murry – Outdoor Recreation Planner
Randy Howard – Wildlife Biologist

X. PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Chaves County Public Land Use Advisory Committee
Permittees of Button Mesa- 65032, Caprock Playa- 65148, South Caprock - 65090
and Caudill Ranch- 65078
New Mexico Department of Game and Fish
New Mexico Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources Department
- Forestry and Resource Conservation Division
New Mexico Environment Department - Surface Water Quality Bureau
New Mexico State Land Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Ecological Services
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - Fishery Resources Office

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Bureau of Land Management, Roswell Field Office
Environmental Assessment Checklist, DOI-BLM-NM-P010-2010-158-EA

Resources	Not Present on Site	No Impacts	May Be Impacts	Mitigation Included	BLM Reviewer	Date
Air Quality			X	X	/s/ Michael McGee SWA Spec/Hydro.	6/8/10
Soils			X	X		
Watershed Hydrology			X	X		
Floodplains	X					
Water Quality - Surface			X	X		
Water Quality - Ground			X	X	Geologist/Hydrologist /s/ Michael McGee	6/8/10
Cultural Resources		X			/s/Rebecca L. Hill Archeologist	24May2010
Native American Religious Concerns	X					
Paleontology	X					
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	X				/s/J H Parman Plan & Env. Coord.	5/5/10
Farmlands, Prime or Unique			X	X	Realty /s/Tate Salas	5/19/2010
Rights-of-Way			X	X		
Invasive, Non-native Species			X		/s/ Helen Miller Range Mgmt. Spec.	08/06/2010
Vegetation			X	X		
Livestock Grazing			X	X		
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	X				/s/ Jared Reese Nat. Resource Spec.	06/09/2010
Threatened or Endangered Species	X				/s/ Randy Howard Biologist	4/20/2010
Special Status Species			X	X		
Wildlife			X	X		
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	X					
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X				/s/Bill Murry Outdoor Rec. Plnr.	5/14/2010
Wilderness	X					
Recreation		X				
Visual Resources		X				
Cave/Karst		X				
Environmental Justice	X				/s/ Jared Reese Nat. Resource Spec.	06/09/2010
Public Health and Safety		X				
Solid Mineral Resources		X			/s/ Jerry Dutchover Geo/SPS	05/17/10
Fluid Mineral Resources		X			/s/ John S. Simitz Geologist	7/21/2010